

SCHOOLS REVIEW 2015

by Douglas Henderson

Wicket-keepers get a pretty raw deal as there are no statistics to show their keeping skills. However, when a wicket-keeper has far more more stumpings than catches, that really is something. George Lavelle, of Merchant Taylors', Crosby, was still only in Year 10 but after three years in the XI he has taken 40 stumpings to 32 catches. He was captain of Lancashire Under-15s (champion county) and has won several awards. He would probably also have scored 1000 runs had he not been playing for his club on several Saturdays. Clearly a name to watch.

Not many cricketers read the Laws of the game. **The Spirit of Cricket** is admittedly only a pre-amble rather than part of the actual Laws; in a woolly sense it is (part of the Laws) because Law 42 says that **The responsibility lies with the captains for ensuring that play is conducted within the spirit and traditions of the game, as described in The Preamble – The Spirit of Cricket, as well as within the Laws.** Anyway, the **Spirit of the Game** describes it as “cheating” or “sharp practice” to seek to distract an opponent either verbally or by harassment with persistent clapping or unnecessary noise *under the guise of enthusiasm and motivation of one’s own side* (my emphasis).

Many people, admittedly of an older generation, can’t bear watching schools cricket any more because of the nonsense that nowadays goes with it: ludicrous noise, clapping, shouting, everybody called Buddy or Fella, wides applauded with cries of “well bowled”, catches greeted as if you’ve just won the football World Cup etc etc. It’s all cheating of course (see above), intended not to encourage your own side but to intimidate the batsmen. In one match it got so bad that the umpires, fed up with all this, instructed the fielding captain that the game would now be conducted in complete silence (which it was).

Even at the National Schools Twenty20 finals day (see below) the experienced umpires intervened several times to tell the fielding captain to quieten it down. One of them was Mark Williams who, as the new MCC Laws of Cricket Advisor, is responsible for drafting the new version which is due in 2017. As part of the world-wide consultation currently being undertaken, it is proposed that some elements of The Spirit of Cricket should be built into Law 42. In particular, there are thoughts about providing umpires with onfield sanctions against misconduct which at present they do not have (the only major sport which hasn’t).

“It is clear that players’ behaviour on the field has been deteriorating steadily worldwide at all levels over the last few years. MCC are very concerned about this and are seriously considering giving the umpires on-field sanctions to deal with players’ misconduct. MCC are particularly concerned that young players should learn to play the game in an appropriate environment where the expected standards of behaviour are high, and schoolmasters and coaches have a major responsibility to ensure that this is the case.”

The most startling performance of the term came from Robert Bassin of Bedford Modern’s Year nine who took all ten wickets in the Under-14 County cup, finishing with 10 for nine. Perhaps even more striking (literally) was Aldenham’s Lee Tyrrell with an almost unbelievable nine for three, bowling medium quick and nipping into the RH bat. It is six years since any bowler took more than 50 wickets in a season, such are the restrictions on bowlers nowadays (especially limited-overs rules). However, slow left-armed Benjamin

Waring of Felsted comfortably overhauled that milestone with a total in normal matches of 68 at 9.30. He has another year at school. The last player to reach 60+, was Daniel Pheloung, also of Felsted, in 2005. Only four bowlers apart from Waring took more than 40: Robert Bentley of Hampton, Tyler Meyer of Whitgift, Oundle's Benedict Graves and Lee Tyrell as mentioned above.

The season started with a bang with three double-centuries in the first three weeks: In a partnership of 342 with Harry Levy, Brentwood's Rishi Patel scored 200 from 138 deliveries with 31 fours and six sixes; next came Felsted's Reece Hussain (nephew of Nasser) with 200 not out and a final average of 95.58, and finally Henry Gater of Taunton with 206 in 44 overs, including nine sixes and 22 fours. Neither Patel nor Gater matched Hussain's average. Indeed, unusually, the only four players who did average over 100 actually completed only three innings (Milan Mniszko of The Leys) or just two (Martin Andersson of Reading Blue Coat, James O'Neill from Birkenhead and Bedford's Charlie Clarke). None of these reached an aggregate of 500 for the season. Even Hussain's average was greatly assisted by seven not outs. O'Neill's aggregate of 407 for the season amazingly included one score of 210 not out, while Tristan Tusa of Oundle scored 203 not out – with a century in sixes - in a partnership of 311 with Simon Fernandes for the first wicket; surprisingly his other 13 innings produced a total of only 144. Ten batsmen scored 1000+ runs for the season and they can be found in the list which follows.

Oliver Westbury of Shrewsbury topped the list of centuries scored with six, followed by Anshuman Rath of Harrow with five. Benedict Graves (Oundle) nearly matched it with four centuries and a 99 not out! Players to score four centuries were Akil Greenidge (Dulwich), Daniel Escott (Winchester), Zak Crawley (Tonbridge), Nick Welch (Whitgift), Matthew Erasmus (Forest), Cameron Rule (Ipswich), George Hankins and Tom Lace (both Millfield),

All-rounders are harder to quantify but the leaders were Rath and Graves as above, with 1075 runs & 37 wickets, and 894 & 40 respectively, Lee Tyrell (Aldenham), also mentioned above) 708 & 40, together with Ryan Patel (Whitgift) at 1043 & 35.

Churker's College in Petersfield had a 100% record for the second successive year. It's slightly surprising that they play relatively few matches. Sir Thomas Rich's Grammar School, a state school in Gloucester, also prospered with a 90% record, including a win against formidable RGS Worcester. These were the only striking entries in the list which follows. The only other unbeaten school was The Grammar School at Leeds.

We are frequently asked "is this a record?" and the answer is difficult to find unless you look through every Wisden; until the last twelve years where a composite list of records does exist in spreadsheet form. However, it seems fairly likely that one can say with certainty that Caterham's score of 427 for five was the highest score in a limited-overs match, since they were almost non-existent in schools until about twelve years ago. They exceeded by two runs the 425 by Tiffin in 2004. Led by captain Ross Powell with 158, they amassed this score with some brutal hitting in the twenty overs after lunch. Tiffin themselves were on the receiving end of an extraordinary score. Against some perfectly decent bowling, Reed's scored 375 for one in only 35 overs, with three centurions. Sonny Cott, the captain, scored 139 in 85 balls (six sixes and 16 fours), Nathan Tilley, an Under-15, 100 not out in 91 balls (one six and 14 fours); and finally Daniel Douthwaite, in an innings containing only one dot ball, struck 125 not out in 35 balls with 12 sixes and 10 fours, his hundred coming up in 31 deliveries. He took 34 off the final over.

Scores of 300 are not exactly two a penny nowadays, but they are too numerous to mention here. Nor is there space for the several players who amassed large hundreds of 150+. Some of them may be found in the lists which follow.

The National Schools Twenty20 competition produced one sensational result in a regional final when a Sixth form college in Bristol (who don't even have a home ground), coached by Tim Hancock (formerly opener for Glos CCC in its glory days), comfortably defeated Millfield. Chasing a formidable Millfield total of 180 for six James Bracey with 107 from 62 balls led the visitors to a famous victory. However, they couldn't quite repeat the feat when contesting a place for finals day against a very strong Wellington College. On finals day itself, the latter found themselves up against another formidable outfit, Hurstpierpoint, who boast five Sussex Academy players. They were on target to post a remarkable score while Sam Curran – later to perform heroic deeds for Surrey yet still with a year more at school - was flaying the ball to all parts. However, a touch of hubris was his undoing and Wellington's innings later started to falter. 166 for eight was still a testing target, but George Garton of Hurstpierpoint struck the ball as cleanly as Curran had done and Hurstpierpoint edged to victory albeit not without some nervous moments. In the final, Malvern, who had overcome Sedbergh with some ease, couldn't match the firepower of Hurstpierpoint and the latter deservedly won the trophy.

The choice of Wisden Schools Cricketers of the Year was especially hard this year, with three strong contenders and several others not far behind. Two were from the same school, Felsted: Reece Hussain and Benjamin Waring. The latter has another year at school. Hussain scored 1147 runs in 19 innings with seven not outs and a top score of 200 not out. However, Daniel Escott of Winchester was only 51 behind in aggregate with three fewer innings and indeed, excluding not outs, scored an average of 68.50 per innings to Hussain's 60.37. Escott has played five years in the Winchester XI, every single game for the 1st XI. This is a feat never done before, not even by the illustrious Wykehamist, the Nawab of Pataudi. However, the Wisden Schools Cricketer of the Year is Benjamin Waring.